

19  
21  
LETTER

OF

SENATOR DOUGLAS,

VINDICATING

HIS CHARACTER AND HIS POSITION ON THE NEBRASKA  
BILL AGAINST THE ASSAULTS CONTAINED IN  
THE PROCEEDINGS OF

A PUBLIC MEETING

COMPOSED OF

TWENTY-FIVE CLERGYMEN OF CHICAGO.

---

WASHINGTON:

PRINTED AT THE SENTINEL OFFICE.

1854.

Digitized by the Internet Archive

in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

# LETTER

OF

## SENATOR DOUGLAS.

WASHINGTON, April 6, 1854.

REVEREND GENTLEMEN: I acknowledge your kind consideration, in sending me the proceedings of the public meeting composed of twenty-five clergymen of the city of Chicago, opposed to the Nebraska bill. These proceedings consist of a protest "in the name of Almighty God" against the passage of the Nebraska bill, and signed by yourselves "as citizens and as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ;" and so of four resolutions, which are stated to have been adopted with but one dissenting voice. The last of these resolutions is as follows:

"4th. That in the debate recently held in the Senate of the United States upon the presentation of the memorial of the clergy of New England, we greatly deplore the apparent want of courtesy and reverence towards man and God, manifest especially in the speeches of the senators from Illinois and Indiana; and that we regard the whole tone and spirit of that debate, on the part of the opponents of said memorial, as an outrage upon the privileges of a large and respectable body of citizens, upon the dignity of the Senate, and upon the claims of the divine name, of God, and institutions, to which we owe profoundest honor and reverence."

Here I am distinctly and "especially" charged with "the apparent want of courtesy and reverence towards man and God," in the performance of my public duties in the Senate. This is a grave charge, whether preferred against a private individual or a public man, and one which should not have been made recklessly

and without sufficient authority. If unsupported by evidence and contradicted by the records, its enormity is greatly aggravated by the startling fact that it emanates from "ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," professing to speak "in the name of Almighty God," and by his authority. When you shall read that debate carefully, you will be surprised at the injustice you have done me by attributing to me the language which I found it necessary to quote, for the purpose of comment, from the protest signed by the three thousand and fifty clergymen of New England. I agree that the language quoted was "wanting in courtesy and reverence to man and God," and it was for that reason that I called the attention of the Senate and the country to the astounding fact that any body of men, calling themselves clergymen, or by any other name, in this age and in this country, would presume to claim that they were authorized by the Almighty, and in his name, to pronounce an authoritative judgment upon a political question pending before the Congress of the United States. If you had attributed this language to its true authors and directed your censure against them, instead of me, who but quoted to expose it, I should have united with you in saying that it did manifest an "apparent want of courtesy" to the Senate and "reverence to God."

In the latter clause of the same resolution, you also say:

"That we regard the whole tone and spirit of that debate on the part of the opponents of said

memorial, as an outrage upon the privileges of a large and respectable body of citizens," &c.

And in the third resolution, you say :

"That, in our office as ministers, we have lost none of our prerogatives, nor escaped our responsibilities as citizens," &c.

It is your obvious intention in these two resolutions to convey the impression to the world and induce the public to believe that I, and those senators who participated with me in the debate referred to, denied to the signers of that protest their right "as citizens," in consequence of their profession as "clergymen."

Unwilling as I am to believe that you, as the professed ministers of Jesus Christ, assembled in His holy name, could deliberately put forth a charge so unjust and unfounded, yet I am unable to put any other construction upon your language, or to conceive of any other object you could have had in passing these resolutions.

In vindication of my own character against the aspersions which you have so unjustly cast upon it, you must permit me to say to you, with the most profound respect for your "office as ministers," that, if you had read the debate yourselves before you pronounced judgment upon it, instead of following the lead of an unscrupulous partisan press, you would have known that the charge in any of its forms, and in all its length and breadth, was wickedly and wantonly untrue. So far from denying to the clergy of New England, or of any other portion of this country, any of their rights "as citizens," and so far from questioning their undoubted right to petition, protest, or remonstrate, in respect, to any measure coming or pending before Congress in the same manner, and by the same authority as other citizens under the Constitution, the debate shows that each and every senator against whom you have preferred this grave charge distinctly and expressly recognised and affirmed such right. In order to render my vindication complete, and to disabuse you of the error into which you have fallen—for, in your case, it must be error merely—I proceed to establish this position by extracts from the debate, as it appears in the *Congressional Globe*, and republished in pamphlet form at the abolition establishment in this city. At page 11 of that pamphlet, you will find that Mr. DOUGLAS said :

"The senator from Texas says the people have a right to petition. *I do not question it. I do not wish to deprive ministers of the Gospel of that right. I do not acknowledge that there is any member of this body who has a higher respect and veneration either for a minister of the Gospel or for his holy calling than I have; but my respect is for him in his calling. I will not controvert what the sen-*

ator from Massachusetts has said, as to there being, perhaps, no body of men in this country. *th* thousand in number, who combine more respectability than these clergymen."

Permit me to inquire of you, reverend gentlemen, whether you had read my speech, and particularly this portion of it, when you charged me with committing, in that debate, "an outrage upon the privileges of a large and respectable body of citizens," (referring to the clergymen who had signed that protest,) and when, in another resolution, you charged me and others, by implication, with the design of depriving you of your "prerogatives as citizens on account of your "office as ministers!"

I now call on you, "as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," "as citizens," and as the best men, who are under a high moral and religious obligation to speak the truth and to do justice to all men, to withdraw this charge, and make an open and public confession of the injustice you have done me!

Again, in your resolutions, you do not confine your censure to myself, but you extend it to Senators Mason, Butler, Pettit, Adams, and Badger, including all who participated in that debate in opposition to the propriety of that protest. Your language is, that you regard "the whole tone and spirit of that debate, the part of the opponents of said memorial as an outrage upon the privileges of a large and respectable body of citizens," &c.

Now, let us see whether your charge against Mr. MASON, that he committed an "outrage on the rights of the memorialists "as citizens," is sustained by the record:

"Mr. MASON. That it is the right of the citizens of the United States to petition Congress either House of it, upon any subject that may be presented to them, is never denied, never shall be denied; and such petition, upon any subject of public interest should be received and treated with the respect which is due to citizens. I trust I shall never see the day when the Senate of the United States will treat the authors of such petitions, upon any subject proper for legislation pending before the body, coming from the people of the United States, with aught but respect."

Thus it will be seen that Mr. Mason expressly affirmed the right of every citizen, whatever his profession or occupation in life, to petition Congress upon any subject pending before either house. In another portion of his speech in favor of the right of every class of our citizens to petition, he said :

"It is a respect due to them; but when they come here, not as citizens, but declaring that they come as ministers of the Gospel, and, as the honorable Senator from Texas declared them to be, vice-regents of the Almighty—so I understood him declare, possibly he meant vice-regents, to sup-



wise and control the legislation of the country—I say, when they come here as a class unknown to the government, a class that the government does not mean to know in any form or shape, not to recommend or remonstrate, but to denounce our action as a great moral wrong, because they claim to be the “vicereagents” of the Almighty, we are bound, not from disrespect to them as citizens, but from disrespect to the cloth which they do not wear, but from respect to the government, from respect to that sacred public trust which has been committed to us—to carry out the policy of the government and refuse to recognise them.”

Mr. Mason expressly recognised and vindicated the full and equal rights of clergymen, in common with all other citizens, to petition government for the redress of grievances. His complaint was, that the protestants have not approached the Senate in their capacity as citizens; that they did not claim the right under the Constitution, or as being derived from any human authority or earthly tribunal; but, casting aside all human authority and constitutional right, they claim the divine prerogative of the “vice-regents” of the Almighty on earth to pronounce judgment in his name, and by his authority, upon a legislative question, which had been confided by the people, in obedience to the Constitution, to the decision of the Congress of the United States.

Senator Butler’s speech comes next. Let us see if your charge be well founded against him:

“MR. BUTLER. I have great respect, Mr. President, for the pulpit. I have such a respect for it that I would almost submit to a rebuke from a minister of the gospel, even in my official capacity; but they lose a portion of my respect when I see an organization, for, I believe, the first time in the story of this government, of clergymen within a legal precinct, within the limits of New England, assuming to be, as the Senator from Texas said, the vicereagents of Heaven, coming to the Senate of the United States, not as citizens, as my friend from Virginia has said, but as the organs of God; for they do not come here petitioning or presenting their views under the sanction of the obligations and responsibilities of citizens under the Constitution of the United States, but they have dared to quit the pulpit, and step into the political arena, and speak as the organs of Almighty God. Sir, they assume to be the foremen of the jury which is to pronounce the verdict and judgment of God on earth. They do not protest as ordinary citizens do; but they mingle in their protest what they would have us believe is the judgment of the Almighty. When the clergy quit the province which is assigned to them, in which they can dispense the gospel—that gospel which is represented as the lamb, not as the tiger or the lion—when they could convert the lamb into the lion, going about the form of agitators, seeking whom they may devour, instead of meek and lowly representatives

of Christ, they divest themselves of all respect which I can give them.”

Here again you find that there was no disposition to deprive ministers of the gospel of any of their rights as citizens—no unwillingness to receive their petitions, memorials, or remonstrances, and to treat them with entire respect when presented in that capacity, and claiming no other or higher prerogatives than those secured to their fellow-citizens by the Constitution. But their divine right, emanating from a power higher than the Constitution, and above the sovereignty of the people and of the States of this Union, to decide a legislative measure, and issue command to the Senate in the name of the Deity, was seriously but respectfully called in question.

The speech of Senator Adams comes next in order. Let us see if your charge against him be sustained by the record. Did he commit “an outrage upon the privileges of a large and respectable body of citizens?” Did he propose to deprive you or any other body of clergymen of your “prerogatives as citizens?”

Mr. ADAMS said:

“I concur with my friend from South Carolina in regard to the petition which has been presented and ordered to lie on the table. It is addressed to the Senate and House of Representatives by a body of individuals as ministers of the Gospel. I trust I have as high a regard for their vocation as any other individual, and as much respect for the ministers of peace and good will on earth as any other individual; but when they depart from their high vocation, and come down to mingle in the turbid pools of politics, I would treat them just as I would all other citizens. I would treat their memorials and remonstrances precisely as I would those of other citizens. It is so unlike the apostles and the ministers of Christ at an early day, that it loses the potency which they suppose the styling themselves ministers of the Gospel would give to their memorials. The early ministers of Christ attended to their mission, one which was given to them by their Master; and under all circumstances, even when the Saviour himself was upon earth, and attempts were made to induce him to give opinions with reference to the municipal affairs of the government, he refused. These men have descended from their high estate to assail the action of this body.”

Where is the evidence of the truth of your charge against Senator ADAMS, that he meditated the design of depriving ministers of the Gospel of their rights of citizenship? Do you find it in the passage in which he declares that “*I would treat their memorials and remonstrances precisely as I would those of other citizens?*” Is it “an outrage upon their privileges” that they should be treated precisely like other citizens? If you think so, you will doubtless persevere in the course which you have com-

menced. If you think otherwise, you will hasten to withdraw the unjust imputations and repair the injury you have done.

Following the order of the debate, the next senator whom you have embraced in your charge of an outrage upon the privileges of the clergy, is Mr. PETTIT. The first paragraph of his speech on that occasion is in the following words :

"Mr. PETTIT. Mr. President, I am for the greatest liberty to the greatest number. and I will not deny to any class of my fellow citizens, under whatever name or denomination they may appear, the right to petition ; and under the general term of 'petition,' provided for in the Constitution, I am willing to regard memorials and remonstrances, of whatever name, kind, or description, provided always they are respectful to the Senate."

In this speech you find no attempt to deprive the clergy of the rights of citizenship ; no denial or limitation of their privileges as citizens. Their right to petition, memorialize, or remonstrate, "under whatever name or denomination," is conceded and affirmed in so many words. It is true, Mr. PETTIT spoke in very strong and decided terms upon the assumption of the reverend protesters to make known the mind and will of God concerning the Nebraska bill. He denied what they undertook to proclaim as a revelation by His authority, either prophetically of events to happen or judicially of judgments to be inflicted. But he spoke no word, he made no suggestion, against their full and uncontested rights, in their own names, as men and ministers, to remonstrate, to protest, and in the strongest terms, if respectful to the Senate, to declare their opinions of the nature and tendency of the legislation of which they disapproved. The only remaining speech, to which your censure can be supposed to apply, is that of Senator BADGER. He said:

"These gentlemen do not come here in the character of petitioners. These gentlemen do not come here in the character of remonstrants ; they do not come here in the character of memorialists ; but they come as protesters, not in their own name, not with the individual weight and authority which might be attributed to their protest on the ground of their own intelligence or worth, not merely with the weight and authority which might be superadded to this and other considerations from the fact of their being ministers of the Gospel. It is impossible to look at this paper without seeing that the honorable senator from New York has specially pleaded upon the subject, and that the reverend gentlemen who signed it will not thank him for assigning them in this paper the low position in which he wishes to place them. What is it ?

"The undersigned clergymen of different religious denominations in New England, hereby, in the name of Almighty God, solemnly protest."

"In their official characters as ministers of the mighty God, and in his name, they protest against the passage of the Nebraska bill."

"Now, sir, these are educated gentlemen. They are men of experience in their vocation. They understand the true and solemn import of the words here used ; and I have not the shadow of a doubt that they meant to enter a protest in the language imports, as a protest, through the of the Almighty God himself, speaking to the Senate."

In another portion of the same speech, added :

"Well, then, sir, the whole paper proceeds the same name and by the same authority ; and among other things, they protest against the measure as a great moral wrong, a breach of faith, eminently injurious to the moral principles of the community, subversive of all confidence in national engagements, and as exposing us to the righteous judgment of the Almighty. All that announced by these gentlemen, as ministers of God, affecting to speak in his name.

"The interpretation of the paper, sir, I think is impossible to mistake ; but I have said that I think too much importance has been attached to it. Whether this is to be understood as a denunciation of the judgments of God, or as a prediction of his judgments, I deny the authority to pronounce, and I deny the gift of prophecy ; and therefore I think we need not have troubled ourselves further on the subject."

I now pause for the purpose of inquiring of each of you, reverend gentlemen, in which of these speeches was it proposed to deprive you, or any other clergymen, of your "prerogatives as citizens," in consequence of your "office as ministers?" In which one do you find "an outrage upon the privileges of a large and respectable body of citizens?"

I have proven affirmatively and conclusively that each and all of the senators against whom you made this serious charge did, in the debate to which you refer, distinctly recognize and concede to all clergymen, of whatever denomination, the undoubted right to "petition government for the redress of grievances," under the authority of the Constitution, in the same manner and with the same force as other citizens. You will therefore permit me to suggest to you, with entire respect, that it is due to your own character, "as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ," as citizens, and as fair men who are bound by a high moral and religious obligation to do justice to all men, to withdraw the injurious imputations you have made upon the reputation of these distinguished senators, and to make an open and public confession of the injustice you have done them in connexion with myself. You must do this, you cannot fail to do it, unless you claim, in virtue of your "office as ministers," to be



rested with civil and political rights and powers not possessed by citizens as such, not secured or conferred by the Constitution or any other human authority, but of divine origin, whereby you are empowered, "in the name of the Almighty God," to command the Senate to decide a political and legislative question in the way you shall indicate!

After a careful and critical examination of our protest against the Nebraska bill, and of our resolutions in affirmance of your divine right to denounce that measure, in the name and by the authority of the Almighty, I fear that it is your purpose to claim and exercise his prerogative of the Deity upon legislative and political questions. Let me recall your attention to this remarkable protest:

*To the honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled:*

"The undersigned, clergymen of different religious denominations in the northwestern States, citizens, and as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, hereby, in the name of Almighty God, and in his presence, do solemnly protest against the passage of what is known as the 'Nebraska bill,' or any repeal or modification of existing legal prohibitions of slavery in that part of our national domain which it is proposed to organize into the territories of Nebraska and Kansas.

"We protest against it as a great moral wrong; a breach of faith eminently injurious to the moral principles of the community, and subversive of all confidence in national engagements; as a matter full of danger to the peace, and even existence, of our beloved Union, and exposing us to righteous judgments of the Almighty.

"And your protestants, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

With the exception of the description of your capacity "in the northwestern States" instead of New England" and of the interpolation of the words "as citizens," this protest is an exact copy of the one presented to the Senate from the clergymen of New England upon which a debate occurred which you have condemned. After reading that debate and seeing the nature of the objections urged to the New England protest, it seems that you determined to present yourselves to the Senate in a two-fold capacity—the one "as citizens" and the other as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Nobody questions your right; no one denies the propriety of your exercising the constitutional right of petitioning government for redress of grievances in your capacity as citizens; nor can there be any well-founded objection to your adding these other words, "as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," if only as illustrative of your relations to society and of your profession and occupation

in life. This was not the obnoxious feature in the New England protest. The objection urged to that paper was, that the clergymen who had signed it, did not protest in their own names, as clergymen, or citizens, or human beings, or in the name of any human authority or civil right, but they assumed the divine prerogative and spoke to the Senate "in the name of Almighty God!"

With a full knowledge that senators in the debate to which you have alluded, understood the New England protest in this light—and as asserting a divine power in the clergy of this country higher than the obligations of the Constitution, and above the sovereignty of the people and of the States—to command the senators by the authority of Heaven and under the penalty of exposing them "to the righteous judgment of the Almighty," to vote in a particular way upon a given question, you now readopt the protest and repeat the command in the identical language in which it was originally issued. This looks as if it was your fixed and deliberate purpose, as clergymen, to force an issue upon this point with the civil and political authorities of the republic. If there were room for doubt or misapprehension, in this respect, on the face of the New England protest, you have removed all obscurity and avowed the purpose distinctly and boldly in the resolutions which you adopted at the time you signed your protest:

"Resolved 1st. That the ministry is the divinely appointed institution for the declaration and enforcement of God's will upon all points of moral and religious truth; and that as such, it is their duty to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all authority and doctrine."

This resolution appears to have been adopted by you at an Anti-Nebraska meeting, (composed exclusively of clergymen, twenty-five in number,) and called for the purpose of considering that question and none other. It was adopted in connexion with the protest, and forms a part of the same transaction. The protest denounces the Nebraska Bill "in the name of Almighty God" as "a great moral wrong"—"as a breach of faith eminently injurious to moral principle of the community," and, "as exposing us to the righteous judgments of the Almighty." The resolution declares "that the ministry is the divinely-appointed institution for the declaration and enforcement of God's will upon all points of moral and religious truth!" Do not the protest and resolution refer to the same question, to wit, the Nebraska bill now pending before Congress? Surely you will not deny that such was your understanding. You assembled to con-

sider that question and none other. You acted upon that subject and that alone. Your resolutions were declaratory of the extent of your rights and powers as clergymen, and your protest was your action in conformity with those assumed rights and powers.

I understand, then, your position to be this: that you are "ministers of the Gospel;" that "the ministry is the divinely-appointed institution for the declaration and enforcement of God's will upon all points of moral and religious truth;" that this "divinely-appointed institution" is empowered "to declare" what questions of a civil, political, judicial, or legislative character, do involve "points of moral and religious truth;" that the Nebraska bill does involve such "points," and is, therefore, one of the questions upon which it is the duty of this "divinely-appointed institution" to "declare and enforce God's will;" and that, clothed with "all authority and doctrine," this "divinely-appointed institution" proceeds to issue its mandates to the Congress of the United States "in the name of the Almighty God." This being your position, I must be permitted to say to you, in all Christian kindness, that I differ with you widely, radically, and fundamentally, in respect to the nature and extent of your rights, duties, and powers, as ministers of the Gospel. If the claims of this "divinely-appointed institution" shall be enforced, and the various public functionaries shall yield their judgments to your supervision, and their consciences to your keeping, there will be no limit to your temporal power except your own wise discretion and virtuous forbearance. If your "divinely-appointed institution" has the power to prescribe the mode and terms for the organization of Nebraska, I see no reason why your authority may not be extended over the entire continent, not only to the country which we now possess, but to all which may hereafter be acquired.

Nor do you propose to confine your operations to the supervision and direction of the action of Congress in the organization of territorial governments and the admission of new States into the Union. It is difficult to conceive of any matter of private or public concern, pending before Congress, or in the legislatures of the different States, or in the judicial tribunals, which does not quite as much as the Nebraska bill "involve some point of moral and religious truth;" and we are informed, in your resolution, that "upon all points of moral and religious truth" the "ministry is the divinely-appointed institution for the declaration and enforcement of God's will." I do not wish to be understood as intimating that it is your present pur-

pose, through the agency of this "divinely-appointed institution," to declare and enforce God's will" in all matters affecting our foreign policy and domestic concerns, nor that you tend to direct the movements of the political parties, and control the local and general elections throughout the country. It is enough to fill with alarm the mind of every patriot, and to bring sorrow and grief to the heart of every Christian, that you have asserted the right to do this in all cases, and have in one case tempted the exercise of this divine prerogative "in the name of Almighty God." It is true that, while you assert the right, in the broadest terms, and propose now to establish a precedent which will justify its exercise at all future time, in your second resolution you "disclaim all desire" to do certain things from which it might be inferred, on first view, that you do not intend to meddle with politics, nor attempt to control the political movements of the day. This, however, turns out to be illusory, on a closer examination.

"Resolved, 2d. That while we disclaim all desire to interfere in questions of war and policy, or to mingle in the conflicts of political parties, it is our duty to recognise the moral bearing of such questions and conflicts, and to proclaim, in reference thereunto, no less than to other departments of human interest, the principle of inspired truth and obligation."

You do not "desire to interfere in questions of war and policy." Thus far I heartily approve. I rejoice to see that you are willing to leave the question of war where the Constitution has placed it—in the hands of Congress as the representatives of the people and States of the Union.

You "disclaim all desire," also, "to mingle in the conflicts of political parties." This sentiment is admirable. It will meet the cordial approbation of every patriot and Christian. But you immediately follow it with a declaration that "it is our duty to recognise the moral bearing of such questions and conflicts!" You do not desire to engage in war, nor to fight the battles of your country, yet you do claim that it is your right, and, if I please, your duty, by virtue of your office as ministers, through the agency of this divinely-appointed institution, to declare, in the name of Almighty God, a war, in which your country is engaged with a foreign power, to be immoral and unrighteous, although the representatives of the people and of the States, in pursuance of the Constitution, have declared it to be just and necessary. And this, not in the course of your ordinary pastoral duties to your several congregations, but as an org-



zed body speaking to the constituted authorities of the nation. I cannot recognise the principle that, while you are protected in the enjoyment of all your rights as citizens of all your just rights as ministers, you are yet released, by virtue of your office as ministers, from your allegiance to the country during war, and from your obligation of obedience to the Constitution and laws and constituted authorities at all times.

You also say that you consider it your duty to take cognizance of "the moral bearing of the conflicts of the different political parties." The moral bearing of the democratic party, and of the whig party, and of the abolition party are each to be recognised by your divinely appointed institution; and you then add that it is your duty "to proclaim in reference thereunto the principle of inspired truth and obligation." You propose, through your divinely-appointed institution, to apply the test of "inspired truth" to each of the political organizations and to their respective conflicts, and "to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all authority and doctrine," in the name of the great Jehovah. With all due respect for you, as ministers of the Gospel, I cannot recognise in your divinely-appointed institution the power either of prophecy or of revelation. I have never recognised the existence of that power in any man on earth during my day. Only a few years since, and within the period of your own vivid recollection, the priesthood of a religious sect, calling themselves Latter-day Saints, claimed for themselves the same right, by virtue of their divinely-appointed institution, to declare and enforce God's will on earth in respect to all points of moral and religious truth." They also declared that it was their duty to recognise the moral bearing of the conflicts of the political parties, and to "proclaim in reference hereunto the principle of inspired truth and obligation." When the Mormon prophet proclaimed the principle of inspired truth, "in the name of the Almighty God," and through the agency of his divinely-appointed institution, that it was the decree of heaven that STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS should be beaten, and his opponent elected to Congress in the Quincy district, the people of that portion of Illinois did not acknowledge the authority of the prophet, nor did the result of the election strengthen my opinion in the validity of his claims.

I have wandered over distant and extensive portions of the globe, during the past year, where the successor of Mahomet proclaimed and enforced God's will on earth, according to the principles of inspired truth and obligation, as recorded in the Koran; and, by the potency

of his divinely-appointed institution, held, in the hollow of his hand, and suspended upon his breath, the lives, the liberties, and the property of millions of men, women, and children. When within his dominions and surrounded by his bayonets, I had neither the time nor the disposition to argue the question of his right to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all authority and doctrine," in the name of the Almighty! But, when I set foot on the shores of my native land, under the broad folds of our national flag, and, surrounded by the protecting genius of our American institutions, I did not feel like recognizing any such rightful authority of that divinely-appointed institution, in temporal affairs, here or elsewhere.

Your claims for the supremacy of this divinely-appointed institution are subversive of the fundamental principles upon which our whole republican system rests. What the necessity of a Congress, if you can supervise and direct its conduct? Why should the people subject themselves to the trouble and expense of electing legislatures for the purpose of enacting human laws, if their validity depends upon the sanction of your divine authority? Why sustain a vast and complex judicial system to expound the laws, administer justice, and determine all disputes in respect to human rights, if your divinely-appointed institution is invested with all authority to prescribe the rule of decision in the name of the Deity? If your pretensions be just and valid, why not dispense with all the machinery of human government and subject ourselves freely and unreservedly, together with all our temporal and spiritual interests and hopes, to the justice and mercy of this divinely appointed institution?

Our fathers held that the people were the only true source of all political power; but what avails this position, if the constituted authorities established by the people are to be controlled and directed—not by their own judgment, not by the will of their constituents, but by the divinely-constituted power of the clergy? Does it not follow that this great principle, recognised and affirmed in the constitution of the United States and of every State of this Union, is thus virtually annulled, and the representatives of the people converted into machines in the hands of an all-controlling priesthood?

The will of the people, expressed in obedience to the forms and provisions of the Constitution, is the supreme law of this land. But your "office as ministers" is not provided for in the Constitution. Your divinely-appointed institution is not recognised in that instrument. Nowhere in the Constitution or laws of any of

the States, or of the United States, is there to be found a provision constituting or recognising you and your brethren "the divinely-appointed institution for the declaration and enforcement of God's will;" and therefore, in your character as a body of ministers, you cannot claim any political power under our system of government.

The persecutions of our ancestors were too fresh in the memories of our revolutionary fathers for them to create, recognise, or even tolerate, a church establishment in this country, clothed with temporal authority. So apprehensive were they of the usurpations of this, the most fearful and corrupting of all despotisms, whether viewed with reference to the purity of the church or the happiness of the people, that they provided in the Constitution that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." Still, fearful that, in the process of time, a spirit of religious fanaticism, or a spirit of ecclesiastical domination, (yet more to be dreaded, because cool and calculating,) might seize upon some exciting political topic, and in an evil hour surprise or entrap the people into a dangerous concession of political power to the clergy, the first Congress under the Constitution proposed, and the people adopted, an amendment to guard against such a calamity, in the following words:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The doctrine of our fathers was, and the principle of the Constitution is, that every human being has an inalienable, divinely-conferred right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience; and that no earthly institution, nor any "institution" on earth, can rightfully deprive him of that sacred and inestimable privilege.

However, it is no part of my purpose to inquire into the extent of your authority in spiritual affairs. That is a question between you and your respective congregations, with which I have neither right nor wish to interfere.

All that I have said, and all that I propose to say, has direct reference to the vindication of my character and position against the unjustifiable assaults which you have made in regard to my official action in the Senate. I repeat that your assumption of power from the Almighty, to direct and control the civil authorities of this country, is in derogation of the Constitution, subversive of the principles of free government, and destructive of all the

guarantees of civil and religious liberty. The sovereign right of the people to manage their own affairs in conformity with the Constitution of their own making, recedes and disappears when placed in subordination to the authority of a body of men, claiming, by virtue of their offices as ministers, to be a divinely-appointed institution for the declaration and enforcement of God's will on earth.

If your objection to the Nebraska bill consists in the fact that it asserts the great principle of self-government and declares the right of the people to regulate their domestic concerns in their own way, and thus, by implication, denies your right of supremacy, you are acting consistently with your own principles in proposing it.

Upon a careful examination of your protest it is certain that you have acted under a total misapprehension of the principles and provisions of the bill, unless you object to it solely upon the ground that it recognises the propriety of leaving to the people of these Territories what is the undoubted right of the States to govern themselves in respect to their local and domestic concerns. On the supposition that you may have formed your opinion from unreliable sources of information, in the absence of the opportunity of reading the bill itself, I have copied, the only provision to which your protest can possibly be construed to refer.

"SEC. 14. That the Constitution, and all laws of the United States which are not locally inapplicable, shall have the same force and effect within said Territory of Nebraska as elsewhere within the United States, except the eighth section of an act preparatory to the admission of Missouri into the Union, approved March 6, 1820, which, being inconsistent with the principle of non-intervention by Congress with slavery in the States and Territories, as recognised by the legislation of 1837, commonly called the compromise measures, hereby declared inoperative and void; it being the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any Territory or State, nor to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States: *Provided*, That nothing herein contained shall be construed to give or put in force any law or regulation which may have existed prior to the act of 6th March 1820, either protecting, establishing, prohibiting or abolishing slavery."

If the Nebraska bill shall become the law of the land, those of our fellow-citizens who may emigrate to that country, will find it, in respect to its jurisprudence, in precisely the same condition as our ancestors found Plymouth rock, with no code of laws, no system of political, civil, social, and domestic institutions, but w



all power and authority to enact and establish for themselves such laws and institutions as they shall deem wise, just, and necessary; subject only to such limitation as is imposed by the Constitution. Do you wish to have the people of this country to understand that you claim the Divine authority for saying that it is "a great moral wrong," a violation "of God's will," and an infringement of His holy law, for Congress to allow the people of the Territories to enact and establish for themselves their own laws and institutions, in obedience to the Constitution their fathers have made, and to remove all legal obstructions in the way of the exercise of such rights? This is all that the Nebraska bill proposes to do. If, therefore, you continue to oppose it, you must confine your opposition directly and exclusively to this great principle of self-government, for you have neither pointed out nor intimated in your protest the existence of any other objections than those which stand in the way of carrying this principle into complete effect.

Perhaps you will tell me that you are in favor of that principle which allows the people to enact such laws as they may choose, and that you oppose the bill only because it abrogates the eighth section of the act of 1820, sometimes called the Missouri compromise. Before you assume that position, I must be permitted to remind you that it is necessary, yea, absolutely dispensable, to render the eighth section of the Missouri act inoperative and void in order to enable the people to legislate for themselves freely upon all subjects touching their local interests and domestic concerns. You must therefore abandon your objection to the annulment of that section, or persevere in your opposition to the principle upon which the bill is founded.

In your protest, (alluding, I presume, to the annulment of the Missouri restriction,) you denounce the Nebraska bill "as a great moral wrong; as a breach of faith imminently injurious to the moral principles of the community, and subversive of all confidence in national engagements," and "exposing us to the righteous judgments of the Almighty!"

I am rejoiced to learn that the "clergymen of different denominations" in the city of Chicago have come to the firm conclusion that "as each of faith," that the non-fulfillment of "national engagements" is "a great moral wrong," exposing the offenders "to the righteous judgments of the Almighty!"

I remember well my feelings upon this subject, in October, 1850. I should then have received with exceeding great joy to have heard from your lips, to have known that you were

ready to proclaim in your pulpits and in public places, the sanctity of "national engagements," and the "great moral wrong" of their non-fulfillment; and especially when contained in the Constitution our fathers made for us, and upon which all patriots now look as the ark of our safety. I have no recollection that when the common council of the city of Chicago by resolutions, refused to carry into effect the "national engagements" contained in the Constitution of the United States, for the return of fugitives from service, when the council nullified an act of Congress passed for the purpose of carrying those national engagements into faithful execution; when the council called upon the police to refrain from rendering any assistance in executing the law; when public meetings were held, and speeches made proposing to defy death and the dungeon in resistance to the fulfillment of these "national engagements!" I say I have no recollection that, on the solemn and fearful occasion referred to, any one of your "divinely-appointed institution" appeared on the stand, or in the pulpit, or elsewhere to proclaim, "in the name of Almighty God," that the non-fulfillment of "national engagements was a great moral wrong, exposing us to the righteous judgments of the Almighty!" The particulars of that wild and terrific scene remain vividly impressed upon my memory; but I repeat, that I have not the slightest recollection that any one of you was ever suspected of a desire to see the law enforced, much less to contribute even moral aid to its execution.

There is, however, this difference in the two cases: the national engagement for the return of fugitives from service was incorporated into the Constitution of the United States, and therefore forms a part of the supreme law of the land; while the national engagements, to which you refer, as constituting what has been called an irrevocable compact, under the name of the Missouri compromise, have no existence in fact, are unsustained by the terms of the law and contradicted by the record of the transaction. You have, doubtless, been misled by the positive statements which have been solemnly put forth that the act of Congress of the 6th of March, 1820, constituted a sacred and irrevocable compact between the north and the south, whereby, in consideration of the admission of Missouri on an equal footing with the original States, it was stipulated that slavery should be forever excluded from all the residue of the country acquired from France north of latitude 36° 30'; and that the north has always been faithful in the performance of its part of the obligations, and that the south,



having secured all its advantages, now seeks to be released from that you have been misled by this erroneous and unfounded statement, which in an incorrect form, has been spread broadcast throughout the free States, and is now everywhere being circulated and repeated for partisan purposes; and, relying on the truth of the statement, and acting under that fatal delusion, you have had the misfortune to pronounce judgment "in the name of the Almighty God."

If you will condescend to listen to human authority, to legislative enactments, and congressional journals, in derogation of your divine testimony, you will find that Missouri was never admitted into the Union under the act of the 6th of March, 1820, called the Missouri compromise; that, if the said act was an irrevocable compact, it was disavowed and repudiated by the north within eleven months from its date; that Missouri, having formed a constitution conformable in all respects to said act, was denied admission into the Union in February, 1821, by northern votes; that the north, by a vote of 61 to 33, on motion of Mr. MALLORY, of Vermont, refused to admit Missouri into the Union, with a constitution corresponding with the precise terms of the alleged compact, unless, "in addition" thereto, she would "*further provide, in and by said constitution, that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever be allowed in said State of Missouri;*" that, in consequence of the refusal of the representatives from the northern States to carry into effect what is known as the compromise of 1820, Missouri was compelled to submit to a new one, in the form of an irrevocable compact between that State and the United States, by the terms of which she was to be admitted into the Union on a new "condition," unlike anything contained in the act of 1820; that this compact was entered into and approved on the 2d of March, 1821; that Missouri complied with the condition in the month of June thereafter; and that, on the 10th of August, 1821, the President of the United States issued his proclamation declaring the fulfillment of the "condition" on the part of Missouri, and the admission of such State into the Union "in pursuance of the joint resolution" or "irrevocable compact" of March 2, 1821, and *not in conformity, with the act of 1820*. If there is any reliance upon human testimony, if there is any faith to be attached to historical and official records, these facts are true. Being true, there is no provision in the "national engagement," contained in the joint resolution of 1821, under which Missouri was

admitted into the Union, whereby slavery was prohibited north of 36° 30', or elsewhere in the Territories of the United States; nor does the Nebraska bill propose to repeal, impair, or in any manner affect that "irrevocable compact." Is it not manifest, therefore, according to the evidences accessible to the human understanding, that you have labored under a lamentable delusion in supposing that the Nebraska bill involved "a breach of faith" or "an injury" to the morals of the community and subversive of all confidence in engagements?"

When you shall have withdrawn the unfounded allegation that the bill involves "a breach of faith," and shall have made public confession of the injustice you have done the Senate in this particular, perhaps you will conceive it to be your duty to persevere in your opposition to its passage, upon the ground that it renders inoperative and void the eighth section of the act of 1820, in which Congress assumed the right to prohibit slavery in the country, not only while it should remain territory, but in all time to come, after it shall have been subdivided and admitted into the Union as sovereign and independent States. Reminding you again that it was necessary to render that section inoperative and void in order to recognise the great principle of self-government and State equality, and to leave the people free to regulate their local concerns and domestic institutions in their own way, you will discover that your opposition is confined exclusively to the principle of popular sovereignty. It does not vary the question any degree, that human slavery is, in your opinion, a great moral wrong. If so, it is not the only wrong upon which the people of each of the States and Territories of this Union are called upon to act and decide for themselves. In the opinion of a large and respectable portion of our people, the manufacture and sale of ardent spirits and intoxicating drinks is monstrous wrong, eminently injurious to the morals of the community. While these opinions are honestly entertained, and vigorous efforts are being made to induce the legislatures of the different States and Territories to pass laws for their enforcement, I have witnessed no attempt to induce Congress to declare the "Maine law" to be in force in all the Territories of the United States, and to remain in force forever in the States to be formed therefrom, regardless of the rights and wishes of the people to be affected thereby.

A very large and exemplary portion of our Christian community firmly believe that the practice of carrying the mails, of running

age-coaches for the conveyance of passengers, and of keeping open public houses and bar-rooms for gain on Sunday, is a great moral wrong; yet if Congress should propose to declare, by a fundamental and irrevocable act, that, in all time to come, such practices should never be tolerated in any of the territory which we now possess or may hereafter acquire, nor in any new State to be formed from such territory, it is possible that another portion of the Christian community, equally exemplary and sincere, might rise up and say that it is their firm conviction, after a thorough examination of the Holy Scriptures, that the seventh day, instead of the first day of the week, is the Sabbath which God has commanded us to keep holy; and that, if this law passes, you exclude us and our brethren and descendants forever from settling in those territories and States, or compel us to conform to an article religious faith repugnant to our conscientious belief. Although you may be of the opinion, and doubtless are, that the practice of performing secular duties, and attending to worldly affairs on Sunday, is not in accordance with the divine law as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, it does not appear that you desire the interference of Congress in this particular to deprive the people of the Territories and new States of the privilege of regulating these matters in conformity with their sense of propriety and duty. I trust that the great body of the American people look upon the manufacture, sale, and use of instruments and implements of gaming as a wrong eminently injurious to the public morals; yet I have heard objection to leaving the people of each State and Territory free to determine that question according to their sense of right and propriety.

I will not trouble you further with this class of cases, having cited enough to illustrate the principle. The entire criminal code of each State and Territory of the Union, and every provision thereof, is supposed to relate to some great moral wrong which the people in their sovereign capacity have deemed it their duty to prohibit, and, if possible, prevent by penalties and punishments. Inasmuch as we are willing to leave these questions, and all others which are supposed to be injurious to the morals of the community and prejudicial to the best interests of society, in the hands of the people of the respective States and Territories, would it not be better and wiser to entrust the every question to the arbitrament of the same authority, rather than to violate the great principle of self-government which lies at the foundation of all our free institutions? If I correctly

understand your position, you do not object to permitting the people of the Territories, in the same manner as in the States, to exercise all rightful power and authority in all matters affecting the rights, interests, and happiness of white men. If the people are capable of self-government, I do not understand that it requires any higher degree of intelligence, virtue, or civilization, to legislate for the negro than for the white man. It will not be pretended that the legislature of any Territory or State would or could, under the Constitution, deprive any free-man, black or white, of his liberty, except for crime; nor will it be insisted that Congress has the power to confer any such authority. Hence there is no possibility of a free man being reduced to slavery, or of the number of slaves in the United States being increased by the passage of the Nebraska bill. The only effect it could possibly have in respect to the slave is, that, in a certain contingency, he might be permitted to enter the country, and remain there as such, and in a certain other contingency he could not. If a slave should be removed from Kentucky to Nebraska, the effect would be to reduce the number on the east side of the Mississippi to the same extent that it was increased on the west, without enlarging the political power of the master or producing any injurious consequences to the slave; while, by the mere fact of his removal from an old country to a new one, from poor lands to rich ones, from a scarcity to an abundance of provisions, his temporal condition would be improved and his physical comforts increased. His presence in the new Territory could not in any mode or degree affect or injure any human being in any other Territory or State. If his presence should be offensive or injurious to any body it would be to the people of the Territory or State where he was located. Then, why not leave it to the people of such Territory or State to decide for themselves whether he shall be permitted to come or not? No body else has any interest in it; no other State or Territory would be affected by it. It is purely a question of domestic concern, which, for weal or for woe, affects the people of such Territory or State, and no body else. You think that you are abundantly competent to decide this question now and forever. If you should remove to Nebraska, with the view of making it your permanent home, would you be any less competent to decide it when you should have arrived in the country?

Thus, you see that the principle of the Nebraska bill is purely a question of self-government, involving the right and capacity of the people to make their own laws and manage their own local and domestic concerns. This



is the only controverted principle involved in the bill. I am unwilling to believe that, upon mature reflection, and with all the advantages which your Christian character and experience may enable you to summon to your assistance, you will sanction the declaration that a proposition to carry this principle into effect is "a great moral wrong, exposing us to the righteous judgments of the Almighty."

It is the principle upon which the thirteen colonies separated from the imperial government. It is the principle in defence of which the battles of the Revolution were fought. It is the principle to which all our free institutions owe their existence, and upon which our entire republican system rests. This great principle is recognised and affirmed in the Constitution and bill of rights of every State in this Union as the corner-stone in the temple of our liberties. It was under the operation of this principle that slavery retired from the New England States. It was in obedience to its potential influence that slavery disappeared from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. It was by virtue of this principle that California came into the Union with her free constitution. It is in obedience to this principle that slavery is excluded from all the free States of this Union; and I trust that, whenever, in God's providence, it shall cease in the States where it now exists, it may cease under the operation of this principle, and NONE OTHER!

In conclusion, reverend gentlemen, permit me to say to you, in all kindness and sincerity, that it is with extreme reluctance that I submit this vindication of my character and posi-

tion against the assaults which, I conceive, you have so unjustly made upon them. My response for your holy calling would induce me to submit, in silence, even to an unmerited rebuke in preference to engaging in a controversy with ministers of the Gospel in any case where duty did not compel me to speak. The charges for which you have arraigned me were a part of my official duty, in the performance of a high public trust, for which I am responsible to my State, to the Constitution, and to God. The principle which it has been my duty to carry into effect, and for the support of which I have incurred your displeasure, is one to which all the institutions of my State and of each other State of this confederacy, owe their existence, and for the protection and preservation of which the Constitution of the United States was formed. With my conscientious convictions of the nature of the trust confided to my hands, I cannot doubt that fidelity to this principle and fidelity to that Constitution will carry with it the blessings of Heaven.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,  
your obedient servant,

S. A. DOUGLAS

To the Reverend Messrs. A. M. Stewart, H. Klammer, A. Kengon, James E. Wilson, Wenz, Geo. L. Mulfinger, Timpson, Geo. R. H. Richardson, S. Bolles, T. V. Watson, W. A. Nichols, Joseph H. Leonard, J. Namara, J. M. Weed, J. Sinclair, E. Gammon, John C. Holbrook, A. H. Egerton, Paul Anderson, Harvey Curtiss, J. Clark, R. F. Shinn, Luther Stone, A. Henderson, and ——— Fitch.





